



Dear Senator Bye, Representative Walker and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Helene Figueroa, I am a resident of Hartford and I am testifying on behalf of 4,300 family child care providers who have recently joined with CSEA/SEIU Local 2001. As you may be aware, the Malloy administration with the active participation of the Office of Early Childhood and CSEA reached a tentative agreement on rates, professional development and formal representation of family child care providers in matters related to Care 4 Kids. You will soon receive a copy of the contract. This is a transformational contract. It changes the way Early Care and Education is provided to our neediest children. It will move Care 4 Kids from a custodial program to one of early care, appropriate development activities, and education.

Members are relieved to finally see the Care 4 Kids rates increase after 12 years of receiving no increase at all. They are equally enthusiastic over the recognition that the contract affords them as early educators. A little dignity and respect goes a long way.

Tonight we are focused on the Governor's Care 4 Kids line item, which reflects a raise in the rates for children under three in licensed family homes that is more in keeping with the differential that is currently paid to centers that care for this age group. The budget also reflects an overall increase of 3% for all children in Care 4 Kids, School Readiness, and State Funded Child Development Centers. This is terrific.

Gone are the days when Care 4 Kids was regarded strictly as a work-support program or shall we say, cheap babysitting to get parents off Welfare. With the State facing the largest achievement gap in the country, we can ill-afford to short-change any person or organization that interfaces with our youngest learners. Each and every setting that cares for and educates children under age five must be of high quality, regardless of the zip code it happens to be in, if they have 2 children or 200 children, or if it is based in a public school, independently owned center or the home of a loving relative.

An increase in Care 4 Kids rates this year is a critical down payment to improve the quality of care in early childhood programs across the board. Please support this important investment in low-income families and children. Our future depends on it.

Helene Figueroa
Child Care Division Director

Helene Figueroa 2/14/14